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SUBJECT Interview with Christopher Boyce

ED BRADLEY: Last week British spy Geoffrey Prime went to jail for giving away the most sensitive British and American secrets. Five years ago, so did this man, Christopher Boyce. What he had given away to the Soviets -- or, more accurately, sold to the Soviets -- was the secret that our satellite surveillance system was telling us just about everything the Russians were up to. Having learned that we were listening in, the Soviets started putting out false information. What that did was to make our intelligence-gathering satellites virtually useless.

Boyce is now serving 40 years for espionage at Marion federal penitentiary. Recently we talked with him about why he and his partner, Dalton Lee, did it.

You willingly turned that information over to the Russians.

CHRISTOPHER BOYCE: You bet.

BRADLEY: In the courts of this land, you've been tried and convicted...

BOYCE: Uh-huh.

BRADLEY: ...of espionage.

BOYCE: Right.

BRADLEY: You are a traitor.

BOYCE: Uh-huh.

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BRADLEY: Does that bother you?

BOYCE: Well, if you qualify it as a traitor to what? I think that you can't protect any freedoms or liberties behind stockpiles of nuclear weapons and chemical and biological weapons. And I think that the United States Government is eventually going to involve the United States and the rest of the world in a nuclear war. And I don't mind being called a traitor to the United States Government at all. No. I think the United States Government needs a few more traitors. Humanity needs a few more.

BRADLEY: Senator Daniel Moynihan, the Vice Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, believes that what Boyce and Lee turned over to the Russians had a major impact on the SALT talks.

Senator, how would you describe to the average American just what happened as a result of Boyce and Lee?

SENATOR DANIEL MOYNIHAN: Basically, with respect to the satellite systems that were compromised, they made them, temporarily at least, useless to us, because the Soviets could block them. And the fear that that would happen, had happened permeated the Senate, and as much as any one thing was responsible for the failure of the SALT treaty. And if you think, as I do, that the breakdown of our arms negotiations with the Soviets is an ominous event, then nothing quite so awful has happened to our country as the escapade of these two young men.

BRADLEY: All of that information was accurate material.

It's difficult to understand why Boyce held such a grudge against his country. He had so much of what this nation can bestow on its young men. He grew up here in Palos Verdes, one of the wealthiest communities in this country. He was the oldest of nine children in a very closely-knit family. His father had left a career with the FBI for a job in private industry that paid a lot more money. Boyce was said to be sensitive, intelligent, and a devout Catholic.

You know, at your trial -- and I want to get this quote right -- Monsignor McCarthy, the priest you served as an altar boy, said, "To my knowledge, he has the highest reputation for truth, veracity, and integrity." That's the way he saw you.

BOYCE: Well, it was awful nice of him to say that. I think he's dead now.

BRADLEY: But from what he knew of you and your life then, was that the truth?

BOYCE: Well, that's how I was brought up. Yes.

BRADLEY: It may be an irony that it was in church that Boyce, the man so highly recommended by his priest, became buddies with his future partner in espionage, Dalton Lee. Both served as altar boys. Boy practiced the sport of falconry. They attended this high school together. It was a time of discontent: Vietnam, Watergate, drugs.

Dalton Lee, Boyce's friend, got into trouble for pushing drugs. Chris stayed clean. But he says political events made his ideals crumble. He gave up on religion, lost interest in college. He decided to get a job.

BOYCE: I was taking history courses and flying my falcons up there, and I was having so much fun I started to feel guilty about it, I think, you know. And my father offered -- and it just seemed that in conversations with family that what I was told, "Well, how can you drop out from the mainstream of society and condemn the American intelligence community unless you know it from the inside?"

So I said to relatives, "Well, yes. I can see that point." So I went to work for 'em. But once I did, they were worst than I ever dreamed.

BRADLEY: With the help of his father, 21-year-old Chris Boyce, a dropout from three colleges with no real work experience, was able to land a job here at TRW as a security clerk. The pay was only \$140 a week, and it would seem to be an insignificant job. But within just a few months, it would lead Boyce to another job, this one in the black vault, or code room, a facility so sensitive, so top secret that only eight other people with the highest government security clearances had regular access.

Now, on the surface, the black vault would seem to be completely secure. To get in you had to go past an array of guards, television monitors and checkpoints. But how did Chris Boyce find that security?

BOYCE: There was no security. Like the codes are supposed to be destroyed every day, but we used to just throw them in the corner. And there was a large blender to put the codes in and you would blend them down to mush. Well, they never used that to destroy codes with. We would -- we made daiquiris in it.

BRADLEY: A few months after getting the job, Boyce started selling the highly classified material to the Russians. His partner in the crime, his old friend Dalton Lee, who used the

money paid by the Soviets to finance his illegal drug business.

Boyce would photograph the secret material with his small Minox B camera, give it to Dalton, and Dalton Lee would hand it to the Soviet KGB agents in Mexico City.

But how did Boyce get such top secret documents out of the black vault?

BOYCE: My boss would send me out to the liquor store to buy...

BRADLEY: Liquor.

BOYCE: Yeah, you know. And what he would do is they'd give me the document satchel, and I would take that to the liquor store and buy whatever was ordered by the different people in different departments that day. And then I would just take the satchel and just mark it and walk it right back into the facility past the guards, say hi to the guards and walk -- they even knew what I was doing, you know. So it was very simple to take rolls of documents and put them in the satchel and take them out the same way that I would go and buy liquor for my superiors. The problem was bringing it back in then, because I would have to keep it overnight to photograph it. And one time I brought a potted plant, a pot and a plant, and I rolled the documents up in plastic and stuck them in the pot and put dirt over that and stuck the plant in the top and then walked in and told -- drove to work and told the guard to go out to my car and bring the potted plant into the offices.

BRADLEY: How could such a security system exist in one of the most top secret facilities in the country?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Well, a very good question, Ed. I don't see how the United States Government could ever again give a security-sensitive contract to TRW. They've made some changes and said they've changed their ways. But the responsibility of that firm is massive.

BRADLEY: Since Boyce's conviction, the dollar amount of government contracts with TRW has increased each year. But the company refused to discuss the nature of those contracts for reasons of national security, and also refused to discuss past and present security procedures at their facility.

Well, who has the responsibility for security?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: The government is supposed to oversee it. The government has procedures. They assume the companies follow them. They were not following them. Criminal.

BRADLEY: Boyce says he betrayed his country for idealistic reasons. He says he found out the U.S. was not living up to its agreement with Australia, a country which provides us with two satellite stations, one of them at Pine Gap near Alice Springs. Boyce claims that while he worked for TRW, the CIA meddled in Australian labor strikes and helped topple the government of former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam.

BOYCE: So what happened was I received a TWX from my superiors which said, "Continue to ship hardware and software. Pilot will continue to suppress the strikes." Which can only mean that somewhere along the line we'd infiltrated their unions.

BRADLEY: Pilot was the CIA.

BOYCE: Right. And Australia, you know -- what's independent about that? They're supposed to be an independent, English-speaking, parliamentary democracy? And, you know, if we're not playing it straight with those guys, we're not even playing it straight with ourselves.

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: That's just another lie from that lying young man. Our government is not in any way involved in the internal politics of Australia. I know that. I assert it. And I know it at the highest levels of this government. That was just an extra added bit of damage by a villainous young man.

BRADLEY: But at the highest level of the Australian government at that time, former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam told us they did believe Boyce. And he asked us to pass along his best regards to Chris Boyce.

In May of 1977, Christopher Boyce was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to 40 years in prison. His partner in the crime, Dalton Lee, was sentenced to life.

Two years later, Boyce escaped from prison. For 19 months he was this country's most wanted fugitive. Boyce told us that eventually you just can't run anymore. Well, this is where he stopped, Boundary County in the northern panhandle of Idaho. Just down the valley there is Canada, to one side is Montana, on the other the state of Washington. This was the place that he liked best. And at some point during his stay here, he picked up a new vocation, bank robbery.

BOYCE: While I was gone I held up banks. But I didn't take any money from anyone who worked in the bank, I didn't take any money from the banks themselves. I never meant to hurt anyone and I didn't hurt anyone. The money I took was all federally insured, so it was the Federal Government's money. So the only thing I took was the Federal Government's money. And if

they're going to chase me, try and chase me down all over the world, I have no qualms at all spending their money while they do it.

BRADLEY: When Boyce wasn't robbing banks, his friends in Boundary County say he was a regular social butterfly who made no attempt to hide, at least from them, his real identity.

BOYCE: Well, I was sitting in a little bar up there in Boundary County, and my friends all knew who I was. We were drinking beer. And on came a news report that the U.S. marshals said they were one campfire behind me down in Mexico. So they got a big kick out of that. I cheered them on. It was crazy.

BRADLEY: Is that a true story?

WOMAN: Yes, it is. [Laughter]

BRADLEY: What was your reaction when you saw that?

WOMAN: I thought it was funny.

BRADLEY: But did you know then that eventually you'd get caught?

BOYCE: When this first began, I knew that I would be arrested for espionage because I knew that that couldn't go on forever. But after having been convicted of espionage and sentenced to what the judge said, you know, forever, 40 years, anyway, and then just up and leaving again, I figured that they must all be so incompetent that I suppose I got a little overconfident.

BRADLEY: But the U.S. marshals, acting on a tip from his bank-robber friends, captured Boyce again. This time he got a 25-year concurrent sentence.

Today, at Marion federal penitentiary, he lives alone in an isolation ward because of threats on his life by a prison group known as the Aryan Brotherhood. His prospects for an early parole are dim.

Do you think you've hurt anyone in the last nine years?

BOYCE: Have I hurt anyone? I think I've probably hurt my father quite a bit. Sons aren't always like fathers.

BRADLEY: He came up through that system that you despise, that you thought was wrong.

BOYCE: Yeah.

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BRADLEY: Is that difficult for you?

BOYCE: Well, he's so set in his ways that there's just no -- I have my beliefs and he has his own. And we're still father and son, but there are a lot of things that, rather than put them between us, we -- there are a lot of subjects that we can still be family on, aside from espionage and the FBI and the military-industrial complex of which he is a part. You know, fishing and old memories, stuff like that.

BRADLEY: If you could do it all over again, erase these last nine years and go back and start over, what would you do?

BOYCE: No, I don't think I would. I think I would just do it better than I did it.

BRADLEY: If you had the chance to do it all over again, you'd do the same thing and it'd put you right back here?

BOYCE: Only better.

BRADLEY: After Boyce and Lee were arrested, the British and Americans were confident they had plugged the leak, but they hadn't. Boyce and Lee were behind bars, but the British spy Geoffrey Prime wasn't, and he continued to provide the Soviets with what they wanted to know. Presumably, his arrest finally put an end to that. Presumably.